

## The School Climate and Its Forms

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**Abstract:** The concept of the school climate is vague and relatively obscure, which is why it is open to many interpretations. Therefore, its approach is made from various perspectives. The school climate refers each time to a different school organization, so that a specific and unique definition of this concept does not arise. The definitions proposed from time to time are complementary and are characterized, to some extent, by subjectivity. However, all definitions result from the synthesis and condensation of key characteristics and parameters of the school climate. The diverse aspects of school climate span various fields, such as social, psychological, emotional, learning and more. But school climate has several subtle and significant differences from school organizational culture. In addition, school climate appears in various forms, which are shaped by the behavior and interaction of all those involved in school life and especially by that of the school leader and his colleagues.

**Key words:** school climate, school culture, educational leadership

### 1. Introduction: About School Climate

The concept of the school climate can be defined in many and various ways, due to the specificity of this term and the different conceptual approach it can take. Thus, there is not a single, clear and exclusive definition of the school climate, since there is no specific and commonly accepted framework for its definition. The difficulties in defining it are clearly due to the fact that the school climate is emerging in disparate contexts (school organizations with different school cultures) and in different environments (countries, cultures). The consequence of the relatively vague and abstract nature of this concept is that various definitions have been proposed and are reflected in the literature, which contain, to some extent, elements of subjectivity. Some interpretations are fencing while others are more concise.

The school climate is a term that has been reported in many different ways in literature, without the existence of a single complete and exclusive definition, but we could consider that the climate refers to the particular atmosphere prevailing within a school unit, as a result of the interaction of the environment and the individual characteristics of its members (Kabouri, 1998). Key factors contributing to the creation of a positive climate are the effective communicational system, which operates within the school unit, in conjunction with a spirit of cooperation that promotes individual and collective progress through successful problem solving, while the role of the school principal is crucial, which in turn can contribute to the improvement of the individual and group performance of teachers and learners, providing them with a safe working environment and an appropriate rewards system (Hoy & Miskel, 2001).

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The headmaster of each school unit, with his vision and working system, is the key person to create a healthy cooperation, which will be a positive environment geared on the one hand to the learning of both pupils and teachers and, on the other hand, to strengthening human relations and coherence between school members, with a view to achieving specific educational objectives set (Pasiardis, 2014).

Exploring the largely indeterminated and vague condition of school climate and its importance, this paper seeks answers to several questions such as:

What is school climate, how is it shaped and how does it differ from school culture?

What are the different forms that school climate can take?

What are the factors that ultimately affect and shape the school climate?

## **2. The School Climate and Its Differences From School Culture**

An aspect that the school climate is the school feeling was first presented by Halpin and Croft (1963). This feeling has to do with the human environment in which teachers work and educate students. This feeling is different from school to school and this is a consequence of the school climate.

Hayes (1994) identifies school climate with all the interactions between the different parameters of the school, which affect both psychology, mood and enthusiasm of teachers and their efficiency and the degree of achievement of the school's objectives, i.e., the climate is related to the psychological situation, attitudes and feelings of teachers towards teaching, and not only towards their duties.

Another group of climate scholars have set a different point. They believe that an organism's climate is the ethos or spirit of the organism. In line with this approach, Brown and Henry (1992) expressed the idea that school climate has to do with the morale of teachers. Later, MacBeath and Dempster (2009) identified the school climate as the entrenched perceptions and practices of the ethos (ethics) of members of a school community.

School climate is created because of all the dynamic interactions between various school parameters, such as psychological, academic and physical, which affect both the psychological mood and enthusiasm of teachers and their efficiency and the degree to which the goals of the school organization are achieved (Pasiardi, 2001).

Seeking to highlight the important value of the climate, Freiberg and Stein (1999) defined the school climate as the heart and soul of the school, in the sense of its quality, which helps each person to experience a sense of personal value, dignity and importance and contributes to the creation of a sense of "belonging" to something bigger than ourselves. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) argued that the school climate is the prevailing atmosphere in every school organization and it is directly related to the individuals involved in it, since it is the basis for assessments of learning outcomes. Wanting to stress the self-evident importance of the school climate to the proper and uninterrupted function of school, Freiberg (1999) argued that the school climate resembles to the air we breathe: we do not pay attention to it unless there is a problem with it.

In addition, Hoy and Miskel (2001) defined the school climate as a set of internal characteristics that distinguish one organism from another and affect the behavior of the members of the organization. The school climate provides a relatively stable quality of the school as a whole, experienced by the participants, describing their collective perceptions of behavior and influencing their attitude and behavior at school.

The prevailing atmosphere in each school unit is directly related to those involved in it and it is determined by the conditions prevailing in the school, such as friendliness, hostility or the competitiveness of human relations. The nature of the human relations of all parties involved, i.e., teachers, principals, pupils and parents, is what

ultimately shapes school climate. The school climate is therefore the amorphous and pervasive feeling that one perceives and feels easily and quickly (teacher, student, parent or visitor), being in the school area during its operation, even if it is not possible to measure it. Among numerous aspects of school climate, Karatasios and Karamitrou (2010) indicate three which are:

The **ecological dimension**: It is the physical and logistical infrastructure of the school, i.e. the building, the halls and the technological equipment.

The **social dimension**: These are the formal and informal rules governing the interpersonal relations among members of the school community. In particular, it relates to the relationships of principals, teachers, pupils and parents as well.

The **learning dimension**: It is the educational environment and the teaching methods of tutors, such as lesson planning, evaluation, feedback, various tasks and activities, the climate of cooperation and participation of students in the learning process.

Based on the parameters affecting the school climate it is possible to include the following in its dimensions (Kythraiotis, Demetriou & Antoniou, 2011):

The **psychological dimension**: expresses the mental mood of teachers.

The **emotional dimension**: it is reflected in the attitudes of teachers.

The **productive dimension**: refers to the efficient execution of the educational work.

School culture and school climate are not identical concepts, contrary to what many believe. Although the two terms have similar characteristics nevertheless they express different meaning. However, there are not a few who express the view that in practice the climate can be seen as a part of the culture. The culture of a school is reflected in the school climate (Mintzberg, 1979), which is part of the organizational culture. Pasiardi in particular (2001) argues that the climate is influenced by the existing culture. However, school culture is the expression of the collective personality of the members of the school organization while school climate is only one aspect of school culture, reflecting the overall attitude of the members of each school unit, being the conceivable showcase of the school. The differences between school climate and school culture are quite significant and were highlighted by Van Houtte (2004) and Gruenert (2008). In order to become better distinguished these differences are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Differences between school climate and school culture**

School climate	School culture
It's the atmosphere of the school	It's the identity of the school
Expresses the human relationships	What's really happening in the school
Distinct	Indiscernible
It is based on perceptions	It's based on common values, principles and beliefs
Displays surface features	It's got deeper features
Flexible with ease of change	It takes many years for its development/evolution
It is noticeable by entering in the school space	It can't be felt by members
Provides a mental state	It provides a limited way of thinking
It expresses the attitude/mood of the group	It expresses the personality of the group
It's all around us	It's part of ourselves
How we feel in school space	How we do things inside school
The first step to improvement	It determines the ability to improve

In short, taking everything into consideration, school climate expresses the particular atmosphere that each school includes and it is associated with all its members involved. Thus, the school climate differs from school culture, since it is the transparent aspect of the school, which distinguishes the collective attitudes and behavior of the members of each school community.

### 3. Forms of School Climate and Its Shaping Factors

The school climate is influenced by formal and informal behaviors expressed in school organizations, the personality of those involved, as well as by school leadership.

The first research efforts on the subject were carried out by Halpin and Croft (1963), who proposed a graded scale containing six types of school climate, which are: open, autonomous, controlled, familiar, paternalistic and closed climate.

According to Kavouri (1998), the school climate is divided into four categories, namely: the open, the closed, the abstention-avoidance and the participation-dedication. In exactly the same way Hoy and Miskel (2001) proposed four similar types of school climate, based on the behavior of the principal and the way in which he operates as well as the behavior of educators. The degree of interaction between the two parties involved results in the following four types of school climate:

- 1) The **Open Climate**:
  - The Director supports the teachers. The degree to which they are guided and restricted is low.
  - Teachers work in harmony with each other with a sense of professional responsibility.
- 2) The **Closed Climate**:
  - The Director is strongly instructive and restrictive and does not encourage or support teachers.
  - Teachers are distinguished by indifference, distancing and isolation.
- 3) The **Climate of Avoidance**:
  - The Director is distinguished by the low degree that guides and limits the teachers.
  - There is a low level of cooperation and ownership between them.
- 4) The **Climate of Active Engagement**:
  - The Director is closed, strict, auditing and to a great extent directs and sets restrictions, without encouraging or supporting teachers.
  - Teachers are united, dedicated, cooperative and open with each other. They are involved in their educational work and their students, ignoring the closed behavior of their Director.

On the basis of the above, these four types of school climate appear very supportively in Table 2.

**Table 2 Forms of School Climate**

		Administration of the Director	
		Open	Closed
Behavior of teachers	Open	<i>Open Climate</i>	<i>Climate of Active Engagement</i>
	Closed	<i>Climate of Avoidance</i>	<i>Closed Climate</i>

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) proposed more forms of school climate, ranging from the human-democratic category to the guardianship-strict climate category. In the light of the relations between the director and members of the school, Pasiardis (2004) identified three forms of school climate:

- The typical distant climate in which personal communication and cooperation between the members of the organization is limited to formal relationships.

- The weak climate in which school learning is neglected, since its members are not aware of the responsibilities and roles they are called upon to perform.

- The typical-personal climate characterizes schools that have a democratic organization, thus promoting cooperation and cultivating human relations.

Two forms of climate are highlighted from a more general and broader perspective: the positive and negative school climate. In a school with a positive climate there is open communication between teachers and a collective effort is made by the teaching staff towards student progress. The exact opposite is true in the case of the negative climate. The factors that shape the school climate are many and varied. The main factors are the manager, the teachers and the quality of their relationships. In particular, whenever the headmaster of the school unit is flexible, flexible and leaves room for adequate freedom and autonomy to his teachers, then the climate is comfortable, pleasant and therefore more efficient (Payne & Pheysey, 1972). Also, an important factor shaping the school climate is its size, i.e., in small schools a more open climate is formed than in larger ones (George & Bishop, 1972).

In addition, Saitis (2008) takes the view that the structure of the school organization affects the climate prevailing in it. Other factors that affect the school climate are the continuous interaction of the school with its external environment and the individual differences of people, due to their different characteristics, such as their gender, age, experience and desires.

Taking into account the existing literature, Daar (2010) recommended eleven factors on a decreasing scale of importance, which shape the school climate, namely:

- 1) **Teacher-student relationships:** When teachers have developed healthy interpersonal relationships with students then they lead them to self-regulation.

- 2) **Feeling safe:** It concerns physical safety within the school and emotional security, which reduces students' stress.

- 3) **Management:** The modern director should have vision, set high, but at the same time, achievable goals and promote interpersonal relations.

- 4) **Expectations of student performance:** The school should give rise to high expectations for student performance and create all the conditions for this purpose.

- 5) **Student behavior:** Teachers' practices delineate pupil behavior, without the need to impose penalties or payments.

- 6) **Guidance:** Teachers offer quality guidance to students as well as personalized support whenever required.

- 7) **Relationships between students:** Students are encouraged to develop healthy relationships with each other in order to work together harmoniously to achieve their goals.

- 8) **School-family relations:** The cooperation of parents with the school educators allows them to understand the learning and psychological needs of their children.

- 9) **Professionalism of teachers:** It concerns the ability and effectiveness of teachers to organize teaching methods.

- 10) **Activities of students:** The students activities enable them to cooperate and develop friendly relations as well as the feeling of "belonging" to their school unit.

- 11) **Natural and learning environment:** The beautiful natural school environment contributes positively to

the psychology of all members of the school community.

In summary, therefore, school climate is primarily shaped by endogenous school factors, such as the human relationships and interactions of those involved in the school process and secondly by external factors, such as social, political, economic and cultural factors.

#### 4. Summarizing

In conclusion, school climate is perceived by most researchers as a psychological creation, which comes from the perceptions, experiences and interaction of all those involved in the educational process of the school unit. Thus, the climate becomes special and unique for each school, thus differentiating and distinguishing schools from each other. The school climate is shaped by the organizational structure of the school unit, the way the educational administration is exercised, the needs, aspirations and objectives of educators, pupils and all members of the school community as well as by the effects of the external environment.

Finally, the creation of an attractive, hospitable and comfortable school environment, which will satisfy all those involved in the school operation, is a crucial objective for achieving the best possible learning outcomes.

#### 5. Perspective

In the near future, an effort will be made to collect opinions and views from the directors, teachers and students of secondary schools, with a view to carry out an empirical study on the prevailing forms of school climate in the region of the city of Larissa, with the formulation of the final conclusions.

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